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ABSTRACT

If contemporary plans for devolved decision making to schools in Australia are to be realized, the role of all teachers in curriculum decision-making processes will need to be acknowledged. This paper presents findings of a study that sought to build a theory of curriculum leadership from the teachers' own perspectives--a theory of curriculum leadership conceived of as a phenomenon of school contexts in which there is a dynamic interplay between a set of contextual mediational means and teachers' psychosocial factors. The study adopts a Vygotskian framework to consider the phenomenon of curriculum leadership as "mediated action." The framework posits a reciprocal relationship between the "psychological tools" of individual teachers engaging in curriculum action, the action itself, and the school culture. Data were gathered through a survey of 2,805 teachers in 109 primary schools and 20 secondary schools in Queensland, Australia. The survey elicited 1,510 usable responses, an approximate 53 percent response rate. Contextual mediational means include the school's organizational structure, social dynamics, and images of curriculum. These factors reciprocally interrelate with an individual teacher's personal qualities to influence the way in which that teacher engages in curriculum-leadership actions. School administrators should ensure that appropriate contexts exist and communicate them to teachers. Teachers should monitor those aspects of their professional lives that enhance their confidence, risk taking, and trust. Three tables are included. (Contains 18 references). (LMI)

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Curriculum Leadership as Mediated Action.

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Introduction

If contemporary plans for devolved decision making to schools in Australia are to be realised, the role of all teachers in curriculum decision making processes will need to be acknowledged. In many school systems, teachers are expected to interpret broad curriculum policy to develop school level policies and programs of learning to cater for the needs of their students. Such a view of professional practice requires conceptions of curriculum leadership which are often at odds with those traditionally held by teachers, principals and school adminsistrators.

Historically, curriculum leadership in schools has been regarded as the responsibility of principals and administrators (Bailey, 1990). There are various reasons why this is so. Firstly, literature within the curriculum field itself has cast an organisational perspective on curriculum activity (see Brady, 1992; Chapman, 1990; Havelock, 1973; Huberman and Miles, 1984; Owens, 1987). Secondly, although there is a theoretical distinction between leaders and managers (Kotter, 1988), many discourses about leadership have been framed by technologies of management, administration and power, often derived from outside education rather than the particularities of school settings which are characterised by quests for equity, empowerment and participation. These points are amply illustrated in the review of the meaning of leadership undertaken by Bass (1990) in his handbook on leadership. There, leadership is considered in terms of role definition, power relationships and behaviours of those who may be characterised as leaders. Likewise, Clark and Clark (1996), in considering the quest for better preparation for school leaders, focuses on leaders as those few at the top with particular skills and characteristics. In contrast, this paper examines the phenomenon of leadership from a broader perspective, where all in the context are involved- each with unique perspectives.

One reason for the tardiness of an emerging theory of leadership which is integral to educational practice from the perspective of all teachers may be related to the fact that educational practice has not spawned a language of its practitioners. Elliott and Calderhead (1993) have deduced that teachers do not have appropriate language to articulate their profession and this may be a reason why they often feel excluded from the discourses of leadership. Another reason may be the inappropriateness of traditional theories of leadership for curriculum action. Contemporary theories of leadership, such as transformative leadership theory, while incorporating concepts which address the context, inevitably express leadership ideas in terms of leaders and followers. Such theories often assume the phenomenon of

leadership to be exclusively aligned with behaviours of leaders, defined as an elite few. While there have been attempts to integrate ideas of contexts and personal characteristics into such theories, context tends to be conceived as either a cause, or an effect, of individual leaders exhibiting specific behaviours. Additionally, discussions of personal characteristics are often limited to the identification of particular behaviours (Clark and Clark, 1996).

Thus, there appears to be limited theory which integrates both individuals and their setting into a perspective where leadership is regarded as a phenomenon of the context itself rather than the pople within it. In other words, there is currently little in the way of theoretical explanation of leadership which can be applied to a whole setting as opposed to selected leaders and their immediate situation.

However, there are some studies of leadership which are beginning to build on that central endeavour of the school- that concerned with learning through curriculum. These studies illuminate a wider perspective of leadership by identifying the more complex processes that teachers, in varying contexts, are playing or could play. For example, Brubaker (1994), in introducing the concept of "creative curriculum leadership", looks for ways of addressing the dilemma of teachers who may be energised for action through the possibilities and opportunities which exist in their schools but experience feelings of being beaten down by "external pressures". The important point in Brubaker's work is that it does relate the notions of leadership to the central aim of schooling and extends the idea of leadership beyond individuals to all teachers in the school.

Continuing in this direction, Henderson and Hawthorne (1995) have developed a comprehensive approach to curriculum leadership built on the seemingly incompatible theories of Tyler, Dewey, Eisner, Apple and Greene. From these theories they have elaborated ideas of "emancipatory constructivism" in which teachers in differing school contexts work alone and collaboratively in forms of reflective practice. They argue that such a state is achieved through a process of "transformative curriculum leadership" consisting of five interrelated, recursive phases (p.12):

Phase 1: Enact constructivist activities in the classroom and other relevant settings.
Phase 2: Practice critical reflection on these enactments with reference to a comprehensive understanding of human liberation.
Phase 3: Promote curriculum design, development, and evaluation activities that support critically aware constructivist activities
Phase 4: Create supportive learning communities. Facilitate the changes in personal beliefs and related organisational structures that are necessary to sustain an emancipatory constructivism over time.

Phase 5: Practice action and formal inquiry that supports the reflective practices of the first four phases

Notwithstanding the work of Henderson and Hawthorne and of Brubaker, what is required is research which seeks to build theories of curriculum leadership from the teachers' own perspectives. Such a move will progress the initiative beyond the normative orientations of the former work and ground a theory of curriculum leadership in the everyday experiences of teachers. In this way theories of curriculum leadership are more likely to better inform policies for school based management and local decision making.

Theoretical orientation

Adopting a Vygotskian framework, this study considers the phenomenon of curriculum leadership as "mediated action". This means that curriculum leadership is constituted by those actions of teachers who seek to improve the teaching and learning arrangements for their students in that setting. Further, such actions are regarded as inherently related to a set of "mediational means" (Wertsch, 1991) associated with the school context and the individuals in that context. Such mediational means are the cultural aspects of the setting but they are not regarded as "determinants" of that action (Wertsch, del Rio & Alvarez: 1995, p.22). Rather, they are regarded as shaping action and, through such action, transformers of the context itself. This means that there is a reciprocal relationship between the "psychological tools" of individual teachers engaging in curriculum action, the action itself and the school cultural context in which such action occurs.

As Wertsch (1991) notes:

> The most central claim I wish to pursue is that human action typically employs "mediational means" such as tools and language, and that these mediational means shape the action in essential ways. According to this view, it is possible, as well as useful, to make an analytic distinction between action and mediational means, but the relationship between action and mediational means is so fundamental that it is more appropriate, when referring to the agent involved, to speak of "individual(s)- acting-with mediational-means" than to speak simply of "individual(s)" Thus, the answer to the question of who is carrying out the action will invariably identify the individual(s) in the concrete situation *and* the mediational means employed. (p 12)

Thus mediational means are taken in this study to be analytically separate from individuals but intimately related to them in particular actions in contexts. While Vygotsky essentially confined his analysis of these issues to natural language, in this study mediational means are taken to incorporate not only the collective history of the context, including policy documents, infrastructures, assumptions and ethos related to educational purpose, but also

individuals' individual experiences brought from their personal histories in a range of sites.

Another essential and inter-related aspect of the Vygotskian framework of this study is that curriculum leadership is taken to be the result of "distributed mind" in that context. Ways of thinking are not characterised merely by individual cognition but by an activity of mind which "extends beyond the skin" (Wertsch, 1991, p.14) in a number of senses. Mind, so conceived, is socially distributed among participants in a context and situated in the cultural, historical and institutional milieu of that context. Further, mind is intimately connected to the mediational means as discussed above.

Conceived in these terms, curriculum leadership in this study is taken to be a phenomenon which is intimately related to the context in which it occurs and created by the teachers acting on curriculum matters in that context. It involves action in which all teachers engage, irrespective of their conscious efforts or not. In Vygotskian terms, curriculum leadership is understood through and mediated by the collective stance of teachers which incorporates not only the collective history of the context, including policy documents, infrastructures, assumptions and ethos related to educational purpose but also individuals' individual experiences from a range of sites.

This position is similar to the conclusion noted by Snyder, Bolin and Zumwalt (1992) in their view of empirical studies as part of the American National Diffusion Network programs. They point out that studies of these programs conclude that "leadership in school change must be shared and involve a variety of roles and functions. No single role or type of assistance is sufficient to bring about successful implementation of of a new program." (p.410)

Within the framework outlined here, the following study was undertaken in Queensland schools in order to address the need for more appropriate theoretical orientations to schools leadership.

The study

The theoretical position outlined above gives rise to a number of questions which need to be addressed if such theoretical orientations are to result. These include:

- What are the clusters of ideas related to school contexts that shape teachers' curriculum leadership actions?
- How do such clusters of ideas mediate curriculum leadership action?
- Are there different processes of mediation evidenced in different groups of teachers?

This paper reports a study which addresses these three questions.

A quantitative study to address these questions was conducted using a stratified sample of teachers in Queensland State Schools, Australia. The specific items in the survey had their genesis in a number of prior qualitative studies (Macpherson et al, 1996). These studies culminated in the generation of a number of propositions about curriculum leadership which were used as the basis of a survey to be distributed to the sample of teachers in this study. Examples of such propositions included the following:

- Where there is a whole school orientation to curriculum in the school there will probably be higher levels of curriculum leadership activity.

- Teachers who have higher levels of confidence in curriculum matters are more likely to engage in curriculum leadership.

- A devolved committee structure which is charged to address particular curriculum matters is likely to empower teachers into curriculum leadership activity.

Two pilot versions of the survey instrument were trialed and the final version was distributed via mail to the teachers in the sample. The population under investigation was the teachers and schools in Queensland, Australia. A random selection of 109 primary schools (10.2% of all Queensland State primary schools) and 20 secondary schools (11.1% of all State secondary schools) was drawn from all state schools. All teachers from these schools were supplied, via the principal or nominated coordinator, with a copy of the questionnaire and were invited to participate in the study. Altogether 2805 teachers received the survey instrument. The selection of schools was made by stratifying the population of schools by Band[1] and location (metropolitan, provincial and rural). Returns were received from all 129 schools sampled. From these schools 1510 questionnaires were returned and these were taken as the data set. Of these, 823 (54.5%) of the respondents were from primary schools and 687 (45.5%) were from secondary schools. 513 (34.0%) respondents were male, 991 (65.6%) were female and 6 (0.4%) did not identify their gender

These teachers were asked to provide brief biographical data, indicate the extent of their involvement in curriculum leadership action (indicated to be any actions they might take to

[1]Band is a complex classification system of schools in Queensland which takes into account size, function and socio-economic context.

improve teaching and learning arrangements in the school), the extent to which school related factors were significant in influencing their engagement in curriculum leadership and the extent to which a range of psychosocial factors (such as levels of confidence and trust) are significant influencers.

Findings and discussion.

Before directly addressing the three questions for investigation in this paper, the extent to which teachers engage in curriculum leadership activity is considered. Teachers reported varying extents to which they engaged in the activities of curriculum leadership at the whole school level (ie those activities aimed at improving teaching and learning as it referred to the whole school). The full range of the scale for teachers to report levels of participation (from extremely extensive through to not at all) was utilised. Table 1 indicates the percentages of different sub-samples who responded to the question at different levels.

One of the important points to note in this table is that a significant proportion of respondents (approximately 60 %) indicated that they did not participated in curriculum leadership activities at the whole school level to any considerable degree.

Differences between primary school and secondary school respondents are worthy of note but the most significant point in this table is the difference between classroom teachers and administrators. While approximately 85% of administrators reported that they engaged in curriculum leadership activities extensively, only 29% of classroom teachers believed they participated to that extent. This suggests a number of possibilities. For example a majority of classroom teachers may see themselves as mere implementers of programs in classrooms or, alternatively, the teachers may well be undervaluing their efforts. While both interpretations are probably accurate to some extent, the latter interpretation is one which is supported by complementing qualitative work as part of this research.

Table 1
Extent of engagement in curriculum leadership

Level of engagement	Extremely extensive	Considerably extensive	Limited	Not at all
Percentage of primary teachers	13.1	30.8	42.5	13.6
Percentage of secondary	10.1	25.7	42.2	22.0

teachers				
Percentage of males	17.9	29.8	36.4	15.9
Percentage of females	8.6	28.0	45.2	18.2
Percentage of administrators	45.5	39.6	14.2	0.7
Percentage of classroom teachers	4.1	24.7	48.7	22.5
Percentage of all teachers	11.7	28.5	42.4	17.4

Concerning the aspects of the school context which influenced these levels of participation, the following items were cited as the most significant. The responses were on a four point scale where 1 represented the most significance and 4 the least.

A non-threatening atmosphere (Mean 1.52, SD .73)
An emphasis on learning and learners in the school (Mean 1.60, SD .84)
Budget support for curriculum initiatives (Mean 1.63, SD.75)
Well developed communication networks (Mean 1.67, SD .77)
Administrative support for curriculum initiatives (Mean .1.68, SD .75)

In order to address the question of which clusters of these school context items may have been significant in influencing curriculum leadership action, the data were subject to maximum likelihood analysis, using Oblimin Rotations. This analysis procedure was undertaken with various subsamples (e .g. all males, all females, primary teachers etc) and these analyses were followed by confirmatory factor analysis using the LISREL (Jorgskog & Sorbom, 1986) component of SPSS. These processes were adopted to ensure that the factors isolated in the analysis of the whole sample were stable and consistent across subgroups. In each case stability was noted.

Three factors of items were isolated using this method of analysis and these accounted for 47.6% of the total variance. One factor included items which refer to the social aspects of the school, the second consisted of items concerning the way curriculum was regarded in the school while the third focussed on organisational structures. Three items were eliminated

because of cross loadings. Table 2 indicates the composition of these factors.

Table 2: Item Composition of the School Context Scales:

Cluster	No items	Items
Images of Curriculum	6	A clear vision statement for the school An emphasis on learning and learners Teachers are encouraged to be learners in their profession Teachers are encouraged to view curriculum as a whole An understanding of students' cultural and social backgrounds Teachers are encouraged to think of curriculum for the future
Organisational Structures	6	Administrative support for curriculum initiatives Explicit decision making processes are known Opportunities for curriculum exploration and debate Assistance for removal of constraints Opportunities to take initiatives Budget support for curriculum initiatives
Social Dynamics	5	Positive role models for curriculum leadership Collaboration in the school A focus on positive aspects in the school Recognition of the initiatives of others A non threatening atmosphere

In summary, there appear to be three clusters of items which are significant for teachers engagement in curriculum leadership activity. These refer to the ways curriculum is conceived in the school, the way the school is organised and the ways in which teachers interact in the school. In terms of the theoretical position elaborated above these clusters may be thought of as mediational means which influence the nature of the leadership. They are constituted by the collective actions of the teachers in that school and contain historical and infrastructural elements.

In order to explore the question of how these school context clusters mediate curriculum action a similar analysis strategy was undertaken for the psychosocial items. The aim here was to explore those personal factors which lead to action. Thus these items were regarded as personal characteristics which influence the extent to which an individual teacher engages in curriculum leadership action. Here again, respondents used the full scale range and the items judged by the them to be most significant (using the same four point scale) in influencing

curriculum leadership are:

Openness to new ideas in curriculum leadership	(Mean 1.72, SD .68)
Commitment to ongoing curriculum development	(Mean 1.94, SD .75)
Belief that personal contributions are important in the school	(Mean 2.00, SD .81)
Trusting other teachers to take curriculum leadership initiatives	(Mean 2.00, SD .73)
Confidence to engage in curriculum leadership	(Mean 2.04, SD .77)

In this case when the items were subject to the factor analysis strategies discussed above only one factor resulted. This means that for the teachers in this study, there appeared to be only one underlying dimension for personal characteristics. This dimension places teachers, at one end, with high scores of confidence, feelings of empowerment, and encouragement, trust of others, risk taking etc in curriculum matters. At the other end are teachers whose scores on these items are relatively low.

A number of possibilities can be postulated for such a result. Firstly, there may actually be only one such personal dimension (a perception of the self) when teachers think of curriculum leadership. Alternatively, it may mean that the items used for seeking information are not refined sufficiently to explore the issue of personal dimensions sufficiently well. This matter is currently under investigation in a study focussing on teacher possible selves as curriculum leaders.

The question of how the three clusters of issues from the school context act as mediators of curriculum leadership action may be considered by examining the relationship between these clusters and the single personal variable structure. Table 3 below provides the correlations between these factors.

Table 3: Correlations between factors

	Psycho-social factor	School organisational structures	School social dynamics	School images of curriculum
Psycho-social factor	1.0			
School organisational structures	0.64	1.0		
School social	0.56	0.46	1.0	

dynamics				
School images of curriculum	0.60	0.71	0.67	1.0

As can be seen from these data, while the correlations are only moderate they indicate that there is a degree of interrelationship or reciprocity within these factors. This means that the four factors may be acting as a loosely interrelated set of factors each of which contributes to a disposition towards curriculum leadership actions. The ways in which they interrelate is not able to be determined from this research. In terms of the theoretical position of this paper, the data seem to imply that teachers' curriculum leadership actions are mediated by at least three school contextual factors which, taken together with their personal histories, give rise to feelings of confidence, trust etc, influence possibilities for curriculum action. These three contextual factors are the result of the history and culture of the school and create, as well as limit, opportunities for leadership action.

When conditions in the school are such that the organisational structures, the social dynamics and images of curriculum are empowering for the teachers in that school and an individual teacher's personal history is such that the teacher also feels confident, valued and trusted then that teacher is likely to engage in significant levels of curriculum leadership action. Of course, there is an interplay of these factors (as noted by the moderate correlations) such that, for example, when a teacher feels confident, valued and trusted the teacher is likely to engage in leadership action to create favourable organisations, interpersonal relationships and images of curriculum. Likewise when such school factors are appropriate they encourage feelings of confidence, value and trust. In this sense it is not a linear causitive model of curriculum leadership action that is proposed here. Instead, one with cyclic relationships involving selves, cultures and action is proposed.

Mediated curriculum leadership, in these terms, may be thought of as being influenced by the factors relating to the context and the self. Particular teachers may be more likely to engage in curriculum leadership actions if they perceive favourable contexts and are personally disposed to those contexts. How one perceives a context and one's relationship with that context shapes a view of what is possible and not possible in that context. As Cross and Markus (1991, p.232) note, "the simulation of possible selves provides a structure for organising and integrating information relevant to the desired and undesired possible selves"

Cross and Markus further argue that such perceptions of the context and one's personal qualities in relation to that context "may be assumed to energise behaviour" in pursuit of realising actions consonant with those perceptions.

This concept of being energised for curriculum action being proposed here may be closely related to emotions that are engendered in individuals when they think about themselves in regard to future actions (Inglehart, Markus & Brown, 1989). In qualitative studies associated with the quantitative study reported here it was common for teachers to become quite animated and emotionally involved when they discussed their curriculum leadership actions or when they thought about possibilities for the future.

From the findings in this study, it may be argued that particular school contextual conditions give rise to more "energised" states for curriculum leadership action than others. These conditions refer to individual histories as well as the collective histories of a school context. This study indicates that those school context factors focus on:

- how the school is organised (in terms of devolved decision making, powerful committee structures, and appropriate decision making processes);
- the interpersonal dynamics of the school (in terms of positive role models, collaboration, recognition of others and non threatening atmosphere); and
- the image of curriculum in school (in terms of there being a clear vision statement in the school, being encouraged to learn in the profession, viewing curriculum as a whole with a futures orientation and a focus on understanding students' cultural and social backgrounds).

The third question posed in this paper concerned the extent to which there were differences between different subgroups in the study concerning the factors previously discussed. To this end a series of multivariate analyses were undertaken using the factors isolated above and significant differences were subjected to effect size examination.

A number of differences attributable to sex, type of school and role positions were isolated using the multivariate analysis but only the significant differences related to school size were significant when the effect sizes were examined. Schools were partitioned into three groups- small schools (fewer than 14 teachers), moderate schools (15 to 30 teachers) and large schools (more than 31 teachers). Teachers in medium size school schools reported that social dynamics were more significant in influencing levels of participation than teachers in small or larger schools. In those schools where there are relatively few teachers there may be a forced level of interaction between them- all must play a part when numbers are small. Consequently, there may be a lack of realisation of the importance of social dynamics. At the other end of the spectrum when there are large numbers of teachers in a school there may

possibly be a realisation that there are always people to draw on- when numbers are large there is always a pool to draw from. Between these options is a situation where interactions are stressed and teachers become conscious of the significance of social dynamics.

The only other difference of note in the subsamples identified in this study related to the personal psychosocial factor. There are significant differences between the administrators and teachers. Administrators attribute far greater significance to these personal issues in influencing levels of participation. Such a finding is, perhaps, not surprising given the fact that administrators report such striking differences with regard to levels of participation in curriculum leadership actions. In fact, such a finding appears to lend weight to the analysis above where the three school factors were seen to interrelate with these psychosocial aspects to energise actions.
Thus, generally speaking there are few differences amongst school types concerning these findings and the conclusions derived from the study about energising levels of curriculum leadership activity may well be applicable to all school sites.

Conclusions and implications.
This paper has sought to build a theory of curriculum leadership conceived as a phenomenon of school contexts where there is a dynamic interplay between a set of contextual mediational means and teachers' psychosocial factors. Contextual mediational means are identified as school organisational structure, social dynamics and images of curriculum in the school. The theory proposes that these factors reciprocally interrelate with an individual teacher's personal qualities to influence the way that teacher engages in curriculum leadership actions.

It is proposed that the process of influencing curriculum leadership action occurs through a state of being energised. When a teacher can visualize that certain actions are possible and that there are feelings of confidence, empowerment, trust etc, then curriculum action results.

If such a position is adopted then there are significant implications for school and teacher development. Firstly, given the importance of the contextual factors in energising curriculum action it is important for school administrators to ensure that appropriate contexts exist and for teachers to then be aware that they exist. This study points to the importance of specific contextual elements that are significant to teachers and hence need to be priorities for both school administrators and teachers alike. While all teachers in a school are responsible for curriculum leadership initiatives, school administrators in particular need to be aware of their responsibilities in this regard.

Further, if there is a reciprocity between school contextual factors and individual teachers' personal characteristics, it is important for teachers to monitor those aspects of their

professional lives which provide them with feelings of confidence, risk taking, trust etc. Programs of personal development may be just as significant in the field of curriculum development as programs of a substantive subject orientation. Such a position reiterates the importance of teachers themselves as curriculum decision makers in school settings and their influence in promoting effective teaching and learning.

These findings have generated further research which is currently in progress. Three projects are proceeding. Firstly, investigations of personal characteristics are being examined to refine how individuals see themselves to be related to their context. The attempt here is to develop a more articulated view of personal qualities than that arising from the study reported here. This project seeks to identify teachers' possible selves in particular contexts and their perceived levels of competence and confidence with regard to specific curriculum leadership actions in that context.

Secondly, a number of schools have been identified where the teachers themselves believe interesting and significant curriculum leadership initiative are occurring. These schools will be used as case studies to analyse the settings and the teachers to authenticate the model as outlined in this paper. The aim of the authentication study will be to modify the model in the light on ongoing research.

Finally, a series of intervention cases are being monitored. Here, schools have been identified where the teachers are seeking to change their organisational structure, their social dynamics or their images of curriculum (as defined by the clusters of this study) or the teachers' own personal characteristics. Through collaborative research methodologies, these settings will be assisted to introduce change and monitored to examine the ways in which the factors are actually modified.

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